

# The practice of the joint negotiation should be improved and unified

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## Background and Methods

Lengthening work careers is a central challenge to all European societies. Joint negotiation on employee's return to work solutions is a site where common concrete means to support employees' return to work are sought for.

The research questions were:

- What were the topics covered in joint negotiations and what topics were raised?
- By whom and how the topics of work ability, work, workflow and work environment were addressed?
- How did the implementation of the joint negotiation related to what was described in the Work Ability Support Model of the workplace?

This multiple case study consists of three perspectives: an employee, a supervisor and an occupational health physician. The data consist of questionnaires before the negotiation, video recordings of the negotiation, audio recorded interviews after the negotiation, the negotiation minutes and the workplace's model for supporting employees' work ability. Work in progress: this data has been constructed to 14 case descriptions and to this study we took seven cases and analyzed them according the descriptive content analysis.

## Results

The work ability issues were raised usually by the employee and in few cases by the occupational health physician. The ability to work was discussed mainly through coping with work, and only in one case through medical history. The employees described practical work-related factors, which they regarded as prohibiting their return to work. The issues discussed were modifying work: cutting working hours, reducing work load and ergonomic solutions. Different vocational rehabilitation options were also often discussed in the negotiation. Often also alternative plans were made.

The occupational health physician was often the chairperson and also took the initiative. The employee's own agency as an initiator varied. Usually the supervisors proposed opportunities for the work modification. In one case, the supervisor thought that the return to work was postdated and had not prepared to discuss at all the return to work or work modifications. When workplace's Work Ability Support Models described return-to-work and joint negotiations processes this was followed.

## Conclusion

The chairperson of the joint negotiation should ensure before the meeting that all the stakeholders are aware of the actual agenda for the meeting. The focus of the joint negotiations, negotiating of the solutions to work and to the employee's working career, should be clarified. The joint negotiation practice described in the Work Ability Support Model may support the good negotiating practices. Based on this study results, an open access e-learning program in Finnish was published focusing on the negotiation interaction practices and key information to all stakeholders of the return-to-work process.

Peek into the e-learning program

